

Central American NEWSLETTER

Newsletter of the Central American Group of the Spanish Main Society.

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PRESIDENTIAL MESSAGE

Stockholmia '86 is over and Central American Group members were among the award winners - first many congratulations to our Editor, Mike Birks, for a Large Silver in his first International venture. Henry Madden gained another Gold (I say "another" with apologies for omitting his name from the listing of awards gained in Chicago), Bill Welch and George McCarty gained Large Vermeils and Stanley Lindo a Silver.

Apologies for a mistake last time; it was my article on the 1892 Seebecks that suffered in some copies, and correctly printed pages 53/54 are included this time for replacement.

We are pleased to start in this issue our serialisation of a translation of Danilo Mueses' "SEEBECK - HERO OR VILLAIN?". Pages for this serial are numbered separately from those of the normal Newsletters and it is our plan to reissue complete when finished.

It is not too early to start thinking about the next Central American Group meeting to be co-ordinated as before by Dr Richard Saundry - date 4 April 1986, venue as usual the Allenby Rooms at the Victory Services Club. Dr Saundry is contacting members with the view to getting possible studies on modern postal history; suggestions for further displays are welcome and will be passed on by your Editor. Displays for our meetings do not have to be mounted to competition standard - the purpose of our meetings is the intelligent study of Central American Philately.

Finally our Editor, Mike Birks, is arranging another meeting for all Spanish Main members at the same venue as last year in Urmston, Manchester; date will be 21 March and full details will be published later but an early note from members planning to attend will help arrangements for refreshments and also planning of the detail of the day's entertainment.

October 1986

NEWTON ABBOT, Devon

John Fosbery

President; The Spanish Main P.S.

THE POSTAL RATES OF NICARAGUA. 1882 TO 1913

by D KILNER and J WHITESIDE

Looking through the various magazines and newsletters of the philatelic press there seems to be, as far as I know, no details of the postal rates of this particular country, recorded in the philatelic press.

Some 18 months ago I met John Whiteside who was displaying at Birmingham Philatelic Society and the question of the various postal rates of Nicaragua was discussed.

The ensuing correspondence produced a list of some 225 items ranging over the various postal rates. I might stress that the majority of the work was done by John Whiteside and the results were checked by myself. These labours resulted in the table reproduced below.

Period	Internal				Foreign			
	P'card	Letter	Reg Fee	AR Fee	P'card	Letter	Reg Fee	AR Fee
1882 to Dec 1899	2c	5c/15g	10c	5c	3c	10c/15g	10c	5c
1 Jan 1900 to Oct or Nov 1900	2c	5c/15g	10c	5c	6c	10c/15g	10c	5c
Oct or Nov 1900-Aug to Oct 1905	2c	5c/15g	10c	10c?	5c	15c/15g	10c	10c
Aug to Oct 1905 to Nov 1911	4c	10c/15g	?	?	10c	35c/15g	35c	20c
Dec 1911 to mid-1913	?	?	?	?	15c	50c/20g	50c	25c?
1913 (Cordoba currency)	1c	2c/20g	?	?	2c	5c/20g	10c	5c?

COMMENTS

1. Period January 1900 to October/November 1900

The foreign letter rate of 10c per 15 grams seems pretty certain. The 6c rate for a foreign postcard has only been recorded as the 6c postal stationery card of the 1900 issue, of which two have been noted. We have not seen any postcards with the 6c rate paid by adhesives.

2. Internal Registered and A.R. fees, late 1905 onwards

We have not been able to record any examples from this period. There was probably a change in late 1905 and perhaps a further one late in 1911.

3. Internal letter and postcard rates, December 1911 to mid-1913

Again we can record very few examples. It seems likely the letter rate rose to 15c, but we have left these rates as queries until more evidence is forthcoming.

4. Letter weight steps

From registered covers with weights recorded, we are certain that until November 1911, the foreign letter weight step was per 15 grams. From December 1911 onwards, the examples we have noted are all consistent with a weight step of 20 grams. It is worthy of note, that from 1900 onwards, several countries increased their weight steps for foreign letters from 15 grams to 20 grams, (Germany in 1900, France in 1910, Italy in 1919, for example). It is possible that there may have been a recommendation about this at a UPU Congress.

5. Value Declared Letters

We came across a few examples of Value Declared Letters. The application of the principle of Value Declared Letters is so far a complete mystery. What was the rate and for how much was it charged? (Possibly so much postage for a value of 100 pesos?) Any information about this service would be very welcome.

6. Province of Zelaya

It would seem that in this province, there was no increase in rates late in 1905 and that those of 1900-1905 continued to operate for both internal and foreign mail. This would seem to be a result of the issuance of the special stamps for the province because of the currency variation. The few covers we can record certainly indicate this. We can record none from December 1911 onwards from Zelaya, so we cannot speculate on that period.

CONCLUSION

As can be seen from the table of rates a lot more work needs to be done namely on the narrowing down of the months of changes in rates and the queries and questions raised in the Comments above. Any information that members can supply would be very welcome, via the editor. A photocopy of any item would be ideal.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

1. John Whiteside for allowing his findings to be published.
2. Dr D A Pocock of Australia for information received.
3. Notes made from Kilian Nathan's display to the Royal P.S. in March 1985.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Having for some time collated information on the rates of Nicaragua, I am pleased to note that at no point are Mr Kilner and I at variance. I can add that the latest Zelaya item I have is a July 1912 postcard rated 5c (note 6), and that I have a small envelope which contained a New Year's greeting card from Managua, of 31/12/11 rated 5c, so it is possible the missing postcard rate (internal) is 5c.

POSTAL METER MARKS OF GUATEMALA by CJBETTIS

Postal meter marks were introduced into Guatemala in about 1945. The earliest date that I have seen is 13th February 1947.



figure 1

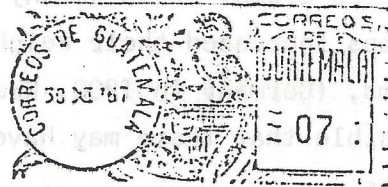


figure 2

Three types of meter marks have been used. Two from Pitney-Bowes (figures 1 & 2) and a German "Universal" meter (figure 3).

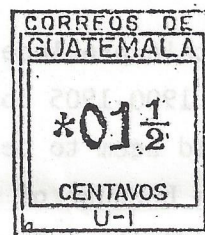


figure 3

Colour in every instance has been red. The Pitney-Bowes marks include a small "PB" followed by a number, while the German mark has a "U" followed by a number. These numbers indicate the town of use although the numbers from the two makes of machine do not necessarily overlap.

In 1963, identified Pitney-Bowes numbers were 1,2,3,4,5,71,72,73,74,75,79,82 (Guatemala City); 15 (Zacapa); 16 (Coban) and 17 (Jutiapa). Numbers 78,80,81 and 83 were inscribed for use on the ambulante service but not necessarily used as such. Identified German numbers were 1,2,3 and 4 (Guatemala City); 5 (Antigua); 7 (Chiquimula); 8 (Quezaltenango); 21 (Huehuetenango); 22 (Coban) and 23 (Zacapa)¹.

In 1986, there are six meter machines in the Central Post Office in Guatemala City. These correspond to figure 1 and are numbered 141,143,145,147,149 and 150. There is also one machine in Quezaltenango. No other towns have metering machines².

Meter markings in designs other than illustrated can be found and are private markings. It may be possible to find these private marks from towns that do not have a Postal Meter service.

All examples that I have seen are simply inscribed "Guatemala" with no indication of the town of origin, unless a normal cancellation was also applied. I have a German "3" (supposedly Guatemala City) with a cancellation for Mazatenango alongside in 1954 (figure 4).



figure 4

The same combination occurs in 1958 where the meter mark is in addition to postage stamps.

As a rough estimate, about 30% of the mail is metered at present².

References

- ¹ Guatemala II ² Correspondence with R J Routhier

***** II *****

In our Newsletter of March 1986 Doctor Saundry wrote on the Pan American Postal Union. Postal rates for Guatemala are cited in Guatemala I and the first mention of a P.A.P.U. rate is:-

November 15th 1922	Interior 50c	C.A. 1p	P.A.P.U. 1.50p	U.P.U. 2.50p
September 1st 1923	Interior 50c	C.A. 1p	P.A.P.U. 1.25p	U.P.U. 2.50p
March 1st 1924	Interior 1p	C.A. 1p	P.A.P.U. 1.50p	U.P.U. 3.00p
December 1st 1925	Interior 1.50p	C.A. 1.50p	P.A.P.U. 1.50p	U.P.U. 3.00p

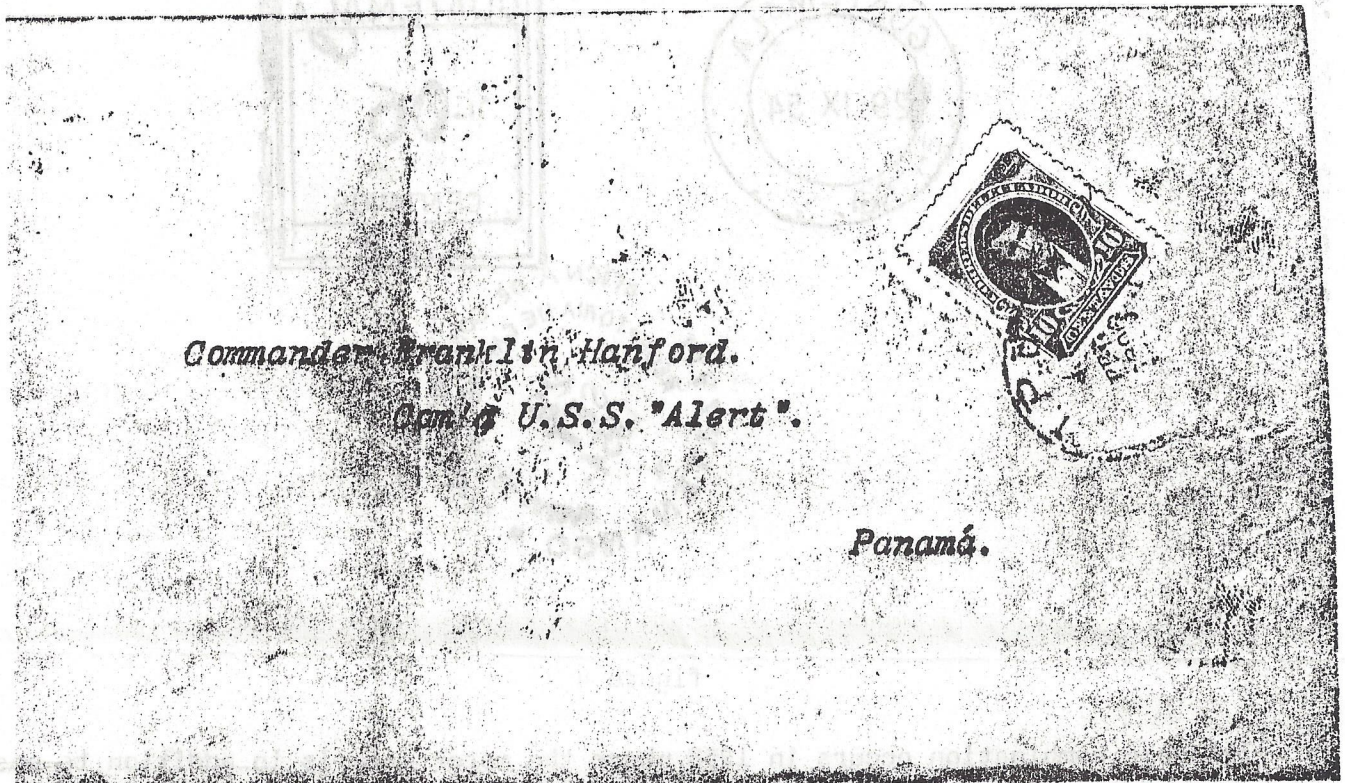
It was therefore 5 years after the Spanish American Post Convention was signed before the P.A.P.U. rate equalled the domestic rate. When air-mail post was introduced, there was, even in 1958, a basic rate and an extra rate.

The basic rate was the same in the P.A.P.U. but the extra rate varied.

U.S. IN ECUADOR, NICARAGUA AND PANAMA

LEO MALZ

Tying in with Kilian Nathan's recording of U.S. covers addressed to Commander Hanford of the USS "Alert" on page 48 of our September issue, Leo Malz of New York sends us the illustrated photostat of part of another cover, this time addressed to Commander Hanford of the "Alert" at Panama.



"The cover is franked with the 1895 Seebeck Rocafuerte 10c and cancelled with an unclear Feb 1 1896; there is also an embossed seal in the upper left corner of the cover which is not shown ('U.S. Consulate General/ Guayaquil, Ecuador' and U.S.A. coat of arms). There is a 'Panama/Colombia' circular receiver cancel on the reverse dated Feb 5 1896. The cover illustrated in Mr Nathan's narrative is dated late February at Corinto, so to add a little further spice to the story, we can see that the "Alert" was stationed in Panama earlier in that month. It is interesting to speculate whether or not the contents of the cover from the Consulate, which appears to be official in nature, might not have given Hanford instructions to go to Nicaragua in view of an impending action?

It is also worth noting that this cover like the third one illustrated by Mr Nathan, is typed addressed. Could it be that U.S. Consulates were routinely supplied with typewriters in the mid 1890's?"

Editors note: Since writing his article for our Newsletter, Mr Nathan has obtained another cover from the "Hanford Correspondence". He sends a photostat of an 1896 3c postal stationery card, dated 20 May 1896, from "Alert" off Corinto, to Don Juan M Hanford, quoting the origin of the name "Nicaragua". Was Don Juan his son?

A MYSTERIOUS HONDURAN FIRST FLIGHT COVER OF 1929 by RICHARD H SAUNDY

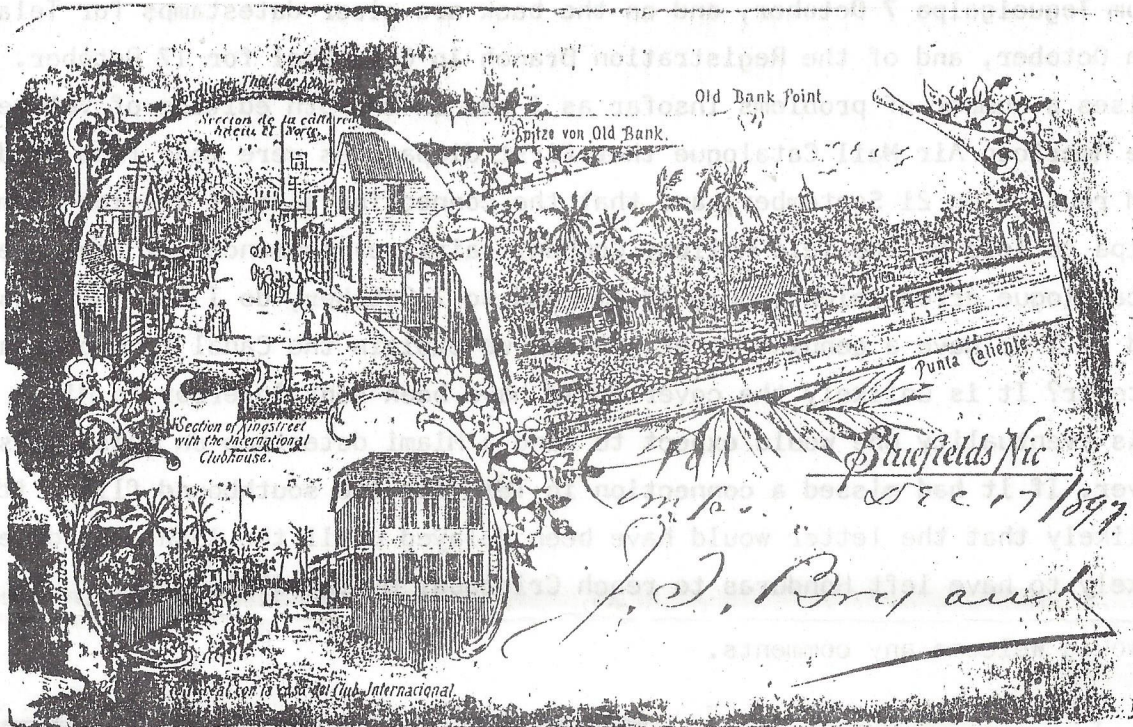
I recently acquired a registered Honduran airmail cover with the adhesives clearly cancelled with a special date stamp of 7 October 1929 for the first flight from Tegucigalpa to Tela in Honduras, and from there to Miami via United States FAM route 5. In this case the cover is addressed to a southward destination, Cristobal in the Canal Zone. It bears an additional postmark on the front for the airmail service from Tegucigalpa 7 October, and on the back are clear date stamps for Tela on the 7th October, and of the Registration Branch in Cristobal for 17 October. This raises a number of problems insofar as I see in the 5th edition of Volume Four of the American Air Mail Catalogue that first dispatches were made from Honduras via FAM route 5 on 21 September, and that the connecting airmail service from Tegucigalpa to Tela by the Tela Railway Company (airline) commenced 27 September. Is this a catalogue error which should be amended to 7 October, do I have a bogus cover, and if I do have a genuine cover how can we explain the Canal Zone postmark of 17 October? It is unlikely the cover could have been sent in error to Miami since in this eventuality one would expect to find a Miami datestamp on this registered cover. If it had missed a connection in Tela for the southbound flight it is unlikely that the letter would have been delayed until the 15th, the date most likely to have left Honduras to reach Cristobal by the 17th.

I would welcome any comments.



POSTCARD PAGE

Picture postcards of the nineteenth century are not very common, and from countries such as Nicaragua very scarce indeed. The picture postcard illustrated here, from the collection of Kilian Nathan, is possibly the earliest known, being posted on 17 December 1897 to the United States. It is a montage of scenes of Bluefields, many of which were portrayed on cards of the early twentieth century.



What is particularly unusual about this card, is the decoration on the address side. Twentieth century commercial producers invariably inscribed their products "Post Card" in various languages and drew lines for the address. The legend at the base of the card appears on all the Hamilton stationery; a Hamilton product perhaps?



Seebeck: Hero or Villain?

This English translation is published by courtesy of the author

DANILO A MUESES

Prologue

There are few people who owe their fame, or indeed notoriety, to postage stamps. Nicholas Seebeck however is one of those people.

Much has been written about philately's misfortunes as a result of commercial contracts realised with some Central and South American countries for the supplying of types of postage stamps. But is this in fact true, or did the popularity of our hobby increase because of the ease which was created for acquiring stamps at low cost?

Danilo Mueses proposes an interesting thesis, but even more interesting is that which results from the vast amount of information which the author offers us on the subject, leaving us, the readers, with the last word.

This book's contribution to philately is twofold: first, published in Spanish, it is in the language of the countries with whom Seebeck realises his contracts but in which very little on this subject has been written. Secondly it offers historical information on Seebeck, which allows us to study and interpret why the events which occurred did occur.

The Interamerica Philatelic Federation - F.I.A.F. - immediately recognised the importance of this work and from its inception gave it its unconditional support, and is proud, now that it is published, to number amongst its patrons.

We are sure that you will enjoy the work of Snr Mueses written as it is in such a straightforward, light and easy-to-read form. I am delighted to write these short lines of introduction to the author, an old friend and philatelist of great standing, who, for many years, has been one of the key figures in the Dominican Philatelic Society where his work as editor of the official organ, the magazine "El Filatélico" has not passed unacclaimed.

The concrete result of this work is that we no longer have excuses, when Seebeck is spoken of, for not expounding our views.

Dr Roberto M Rosende

Acknowledgements

In a medium like ours, to write an investigative, historical book on philately is no easy task. The main problem one encounters concerns the lack of good libraries and consequently the need to depend upon friends and colleagues often separated by thousands of kilometres. Inevitably correspondence can be delayed by several weeks.

The acknowledgements part of the books I have written has always terrified me. I have that fear of leaving somebody out. This section is generally the last to be written. One does not always take the precaution of noting down along the way, all those who have granted favours, be they large or small. As a result, thanks are given from memory.

Let us, however, make an effort not to leave anybody out. Beginning with the people at home, I wish to thank José E Julia who allowed me access to all the literature which he had on the theme, especially that published in "The American Journal of Philately", and to the engineer Gustavo A Moré who, besides supplying me with some material and taking on the burdensome task of negotiator with the publishing house, encouraged me to continue with the project. The other person who was of great help to me was Carlos Marcos Machado who undertook a complete revision of the manuscript making valuable corrections of style, syntax and even grammar (especially my tendency to write the word tarjeta with a g) thus helping to make the work more legible.

The most difficult task was the collection of information from abroad. In the search for the facts I called upon whichever people (the majority unknown to me) I believed might be able to provide information. The enquiry took me from one end of the continent to the other and I must acknowledge the invaluable help given to me by Don Eugenio von Boeck (Bolivia), Don Jairo Londoño (Colombia), Ing. Gunther Wiese (Honduras) and Charles Wiley, George C Mayer, Erwin Herschkowitz, Fred Boughner, Leo J Harris and Henry Madden of the United States, Don Ricardo Alvarez and Richard A Washburn (Costa Rica), all of whom sent me most useful information in filling the gaps, large and small, which I had to overcome en route to the successful completion of this work.

And finally, very special thanks to Dr Roberto M Rosende who, in addition to reading the manuscript and making valuable suggestions which clearly improved the work, helped to put me in touch with other studies on the theme, and, above all promoted the publication by bringing it to the attention of the board of directors of F.I.A.F. lending his strong support to the edition.

The help that these good friends have given me was invaluable and I want to share with them the merits this book may have, but above all, the satisfaction of having completed it.

Thanks to everyone.

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

In 1954, or thereabouts, I acquired the wonderful book by Alvin F Harlow entitled "Paper Chase", and through his most entertaining stories I began to know Nicholas F Seebeck, a person who, for almost a century, has become a legend.

And it was not that Harlow made Seebeck "my unforgettable character", on the contrary, the author leaves things somewhat undetermined, and what caused me to have more than a passing interest was the way the author linked him to the stamps of the Dominican Republic.

Years later, whilst I was gathering material for a book I was writing on the stamps of the Dominican Republic, I went through masses of philatelic literature amongst which I found many references to Seebeck which I had wisely collected and filed.

To know and judge him by his acts Seebeck is a character, though when he was at the centre of controversies in American and Europe, his critics, preoccupied with telling of his deeds forgot his personality. Kenneth A Wood expresses this in his book "This is Philately" as he sketches his biography saying "although Nicholas Frederick Seebeck the man, seems something of a mystery, much less mystery surrounds what he did". It was this which moved us to sift through the publications of the time, going on to complete an exhaustive revision of all that we know and had been written about him during the present century, since we believe that a person like Seebeck, who for a decade was the object of intense debates, and who for almost a century as we have already said has been a legend, deserves to be better known.

In general it is not easy to write with impartiality about Seebeck, for whilst he was alive he provoked such hatred that no one dared utter a word in his favour. He was possibly the person most often insulted in philately during the last decade of the last century. Those authors who have written about him this century have not given him much better treatment. However we believe that even a villain can be an interesting personality.

So, was Seebeck such an ill-fated character as he has been painted by most people? Was he as J Majó-Tocabens described him in his book "The Origin of Stamps and their Collectors", "an ill fated man for philately" or was he, on the contrary someone who "with his reprints created millions of new collectors by putting within their reach, through ridiculous prices, an enormous quantity of pretty, new stamps"?

Often when we study things in depth we realise that in addition to the black and white there exists the intermediate colour - the grey area. Let us study our personality as impartially as we can, free of the passion with which they treated him in the stormy decade from 1890 to 1899 when the mere mention of his name was sufficient to unleash the most violent reactions.

This will be an account of his issues, those which we know for certain were issued as part of his contracts, and those which, although printed by the Hamilton Bank Note Company were not as a proven certainty contracts negotiated by Seebeck.

Finally let us try to evaluate in time the effect his issues had on philately in general.

We trust that from this account may emerge a Seebeck, less of a myth, more human, less a legend, more a reality.

Chapter II

NICHOLAS F SEEBECK: THE MAN - THE LEGEND

To speak of Seebeck, the person, is no easy thing. Seemingly he always tried to stay out of the limelight. During the years 1889 to 1899 when his activities were at their peak, the philatelic press dedicated rivers of ink to him, relatively little however was said about the man.

Later, some authors wrote about him but most only repeated the little already known about him without bothering to undertake new investigations.

Nicholas Frederick Seebeck was born in Germany on 19 February 1857. In 1873, aged 16, he emigrated to the United States and practically from the time of his arrival he involved himself in the stationery business, a generic term in English speaking countries for the sale of paper and other related articles. As a sideline to his business he managed the sale of stamps to collectors.

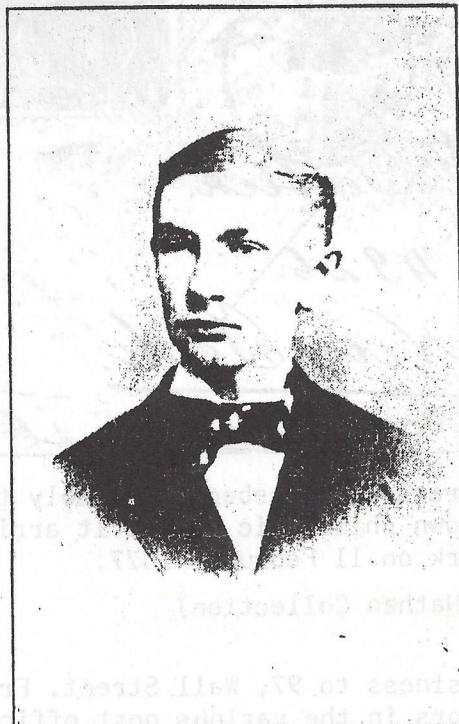


Fig 1. Seebeck in one of the rare photos of himself taken in 1880 when he was 23 years old.

Undoubtedly from an early age Seebeck was an exceptionally able individual and versatile character ("a young man with the rapacity to earn money" according to Wiley). Thus we see that in 1876, having barely reached the age of 19 he published his "Descriptive Catalogue with prices of all the postage stamps of the United States and Foreign countries issued from 1818 - 1876". The work was 48 pages long.

By 1882 the catalogue was in its fourth edition with 216 pages and 1900 illustrations. It gave quotations for stamps, new, used and by the dozen.

Around 1876 we find him established in New York at 3, Vesey Street, where he had his paper business. Figure 2 shows the business card which Seebeck used when he had his shop in Vesey Street. From that address he maintained correspondence with people in El Salvador and the Dominican Republic. In Figure 3 we see a cover sent to Seebeck from El Salvador on 2 January 1877. The cover in Kilian Nathan's collection is possibly the oldest known item connected with Seebeck.

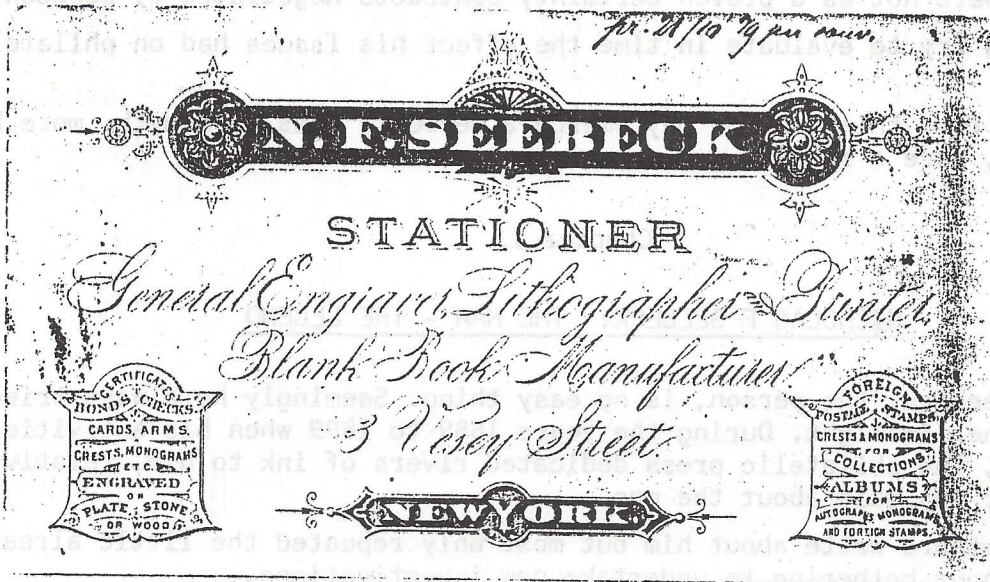


Fig 2. Business card used by Seebeck in 1876.

(K Nathan Collection)

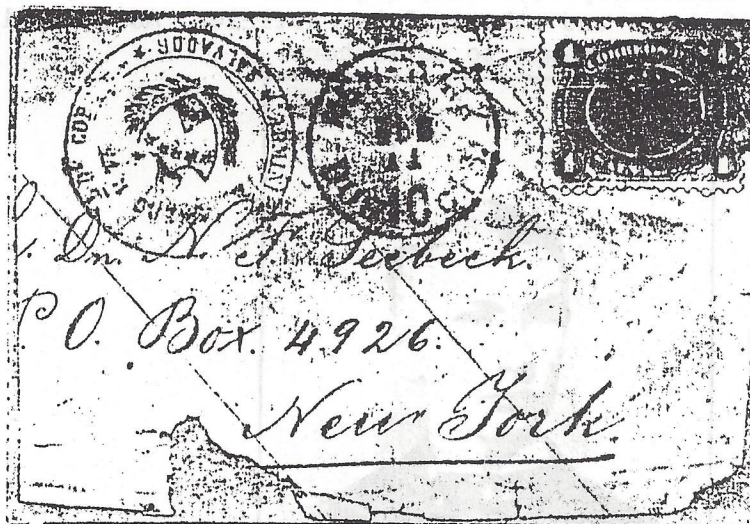


Fig 3. Cover addressed to Seebeck. Probably the oldest known philatelic piece. It arrived in New York on 11 February 1877.

(K Nathan Collection)

In November 1884 he moved his business to 97, Wall Street. From this address he sent cards to postal administrators in the various post offices throughout the United States offering to pay good prices for used stamps from payment for the franking of newspapers and other printed matter. At that time, when a newspaper owner wanted to send a parcel of newspapers to another locality, he would take the package to the post office where the postage was calculated and the stamps were affixed to postal memoranda. The post office employee would cancel the stamps but keep them in the office; thence Seebeck would offer to purchase the stamps from the post office administrators.

Seebeck was particularly interested in acquiring used copies of the higher denomination stamps, well aware that he had a good market for them and he offered as high as 5 dollars for each used copy.

In 1854 he gave 61, Broadway as his address. This was the address of the Hamilton Bank Note Company.

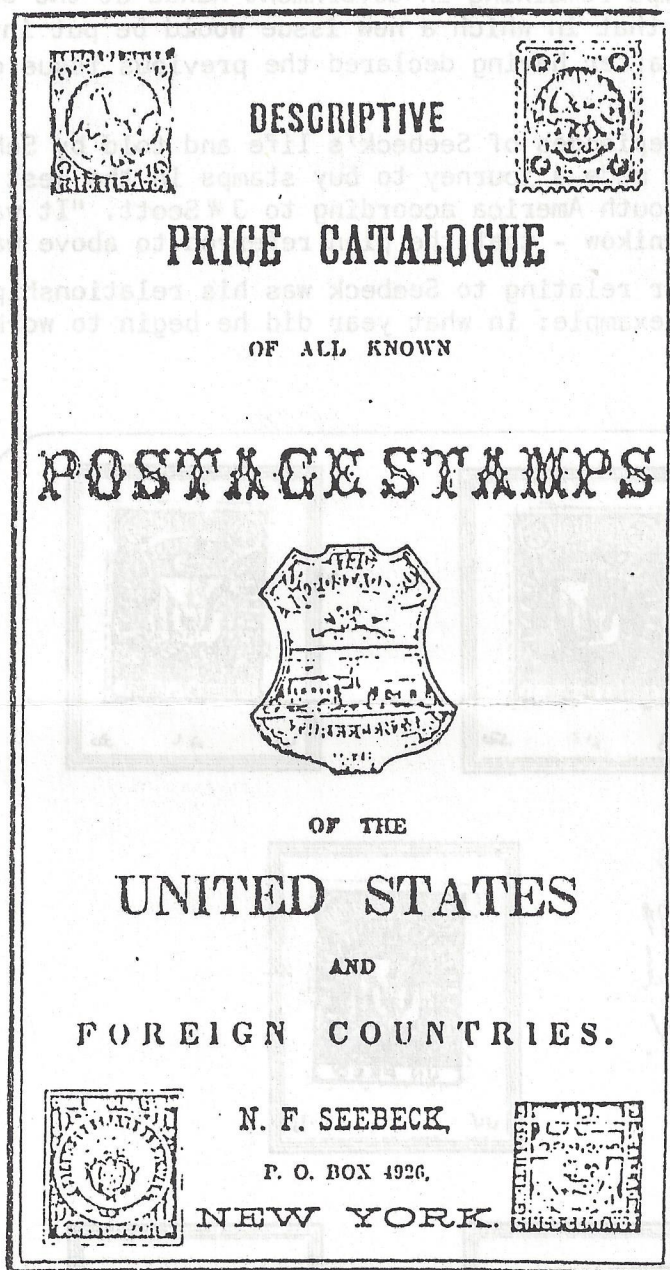


Fig 4. Frontispiece of the first edition of Seebeck's catalogue, published in 1876.

We know little of him during the 1880's apart from his catalogue published in 1882. Possibly one of the people who knew him best was Ernest Schernikow, a keen collector of El Salvador stamps who was furthermore Seebeck's brother-in-law and the El Salvador Consul in New York resident at 75, Battery Street. In an article which he published in "The Philatelic Gazette" in 1916, Schernikow gives us possibly the most personal information ever written about Seebeck. Speaking of the plan to supply the countries of Central and South America with free stamps he says:

"It was some time in 1880 when he first consulted me about his plan to supply the Central and South American republics with stamps for their use which effectively would be supplied to them without their having to pay for them. His proposal was to supply them with stamps in the denominations and quantities to cover their needs for a year, and instead of paying for the capital issued and the labour, to take back all the stamps remaining in Government hands at the end of each year previous to that in which a new issue would be put into circulation, and after having declared the previous issue out of circulation."

One of the least known episodes of Seebeck's life and told by Schernikow was that in 1884 or 1885 he made a journey to buy stamps in the West Indies and the northern coast of South America according to J W Scott. "It was some years after this - says Schernikow - that the plan referred to above was developed."

Another uncertain matter relating to Seebeck was his relationship with the Hamilton Bank Note Company. For example: in what year did he begin to work for the Hamilton Company?



Fig 5. A Hamilton Company card showing stamps from 1880/1881 with "Dec 1879 approved" written on one side in pencil.